

Mary Queen of Scots' last letter

The last letter written by Mary Queen of Scots hours before her execution has gone on public display in Edinburgh this week. The document is on show for just seven days and could then be locked away for a generation to prevent it from being damaged. Colin Blane reports:

Mary's life was a **dizzying mix** of romance and revenge. She was Queen of Scots, briefly Queen of France and aspired to be Queen of England too. She was sentenced to death for **plotting against** her cousin Queen Elizabeth. She wrote - in French - a final letter to the King of France:

Royal brother, having by God's will for my sins, I think, thrown myself into the power of the Queen my cousin, I have finally been condemned to death by her and her estates. Tonight, after dinner, I have been advised of my sentence. I am to be executed like a criminal at eight in the morning.

Six hours later Mary was beheaded. The Director of Collections at the National Library of Scotland, Kate Newton, says her last letter was **remarkable**:

Kate Newton: 'If you look at the handwriting it seems **very composed**, very calm. **She goes through reasserting** her Catholic faith, reasserting her right to the English crown, but she's also looking at her servants and making arrangements for them to have their wages paid after her execution, so it's really extraordinary that she was able to think about that, as well as everything else, **in view of her impending execution** only a few hours later.'

The Mary Queen of Scots' letter is in a glass case, it's about A4 size. The interesting thing is that it's quite **gloomy** in the room because of the fear that too much light could cause the ink on the letter **to fade away**.

Mary was 45 when she died but **her line**, like her letter, survived. The Stuarts **endured** for another hundred years.

Colin Blane, BBC News, Edinburgh

Vocabulary and definitions

a dizzying mix	a fast-moving and overwhelming combination
plotting against	secretly planning something that would damage
remarkable	very unusual, exceptional and so worth noticing and/or commenting on
very composed	very much in control of her feelings, not upset or distracted
she goes through reasserting	here, she confirms in her letter
in view of her impending execution	considering she was about to be killed
gloomy	here, unpleasantly dark (in its figurative meaning, gloomy also means without any positive expectations or hope)
to fade away	to become gradually fainter and finally disappear
her line	here, other people in the Stuart family who would succeed her in her position (i.e. become king or queen after her)
endured	here, stayed in power in spite of difficulties

More on this story: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/8240716.stm>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/scots_mary_queen_of.shtml

http://www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/content/articles/2009/02/19/mary_queen_of_scots_sheffield_feature.shtml

Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2009/09/090918_witn_mary_scots.shtml